

SKILLS OF AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

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Since English has been labeled the universal business language, the majority of companies and corporations view English proficiency as an important prerequisite when recruiting potential employees.

Moreover, these companies and corporations have been developing and expanding their existing employees' English skills by methods such as in-house training and professional development programs. Lately, there has been a *mad rush* of students, administrators, and junior as well as senior managers who want to increase their language abilities. This is understandably so, since today's business competition is fiercer than ever before, and the ability to communicate effectively in English could mean landing an important deal or going home empty-handed. Thus, it is safe to say that the mastery of a second language is a crucial pillar for the employees of international firms. As Warren Anderson, former president of Union Carbide Corporation states, "today's complicated and difficult business environment offers tremendous scope for ideas and imagination, but ideas have little value unless they can be communicated and understood. Thus, a man or woman who can use language with clarity and precision has a very great advantage in a modern corporation. My advice to anyone who wants to move ahead in business, but who cannot write or speak well, is to work very hard at learning how" (Barry, p.208).

The quest for a sudden improvement in a second language should be evaluated carefully. First of all, what exactly is the industry looking for when it states, "the prospective employee should have a good command of English?" What is the ideal language skill that the industry is looking for? The assumption is that the prospect should be able to clearly express his/her thoughts, or in other words, be able to effectively communicate in English. However, under the umbrella of communication lies many categories and language is one of them. Therefore,

the acquisition of a second language is critical if one wants to become an effective communicator in an international arena.

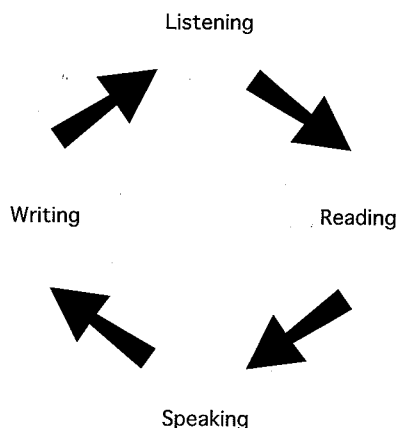
According to well-known linguist Betty Schramper Azar, learning a language requires at least four essential steps: learning words, learning how to string them together, learning about the culture, and tying it all together in communication (Schramper Azar, p. ix). Quite often learners of a second language want to reach the fourth step without paying much attention to steps one, two, or three. Developing a working knowledge of grammatical structures to apply to words (Step #2) is a key step to producing comprehensible, fluent speech and writing (Schramper Azar p. ix). Even though the word "grammar" makes the most ardent students cringe, the understanding of it is essential if one expects to become a skillful communicator. Thus, we turn our attention to the real purpose of this article.

It is the purpose of this article to suggest what may be a more useful approach for those businessmen and businesswomen who are eagerly trying to broaden their English *skills* in the hopes of performing their daily job responsibilities in a more diligent manner, or perhaps just trying to land a job! A *skill* is an ability which can be developed and later measured for performance. With this definition in mind, the following sections in this article will lay out several language skills, that if developed and measured accurately, will result in one becoming an effective communicator in today's global business environment.

The Skills

The four skills an effective communicator must possess are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. These "tools of the trade" are interrelated in the total communication process as seen in Figure #1.

Figure #1



Listening includes the ability to hear words, discriminate among the different patterns, pitches, rhythms, and pronunciations, and then comprehend or interpret these words as having certain meanings.

Reading requires the ability to perceive the written word visually, to match or pair that symbol with a sound, and to determine the specific meaning of the set of words as they are ordered grammatically. When encountering an unfamiliar written word, the reader relies on the recogni-

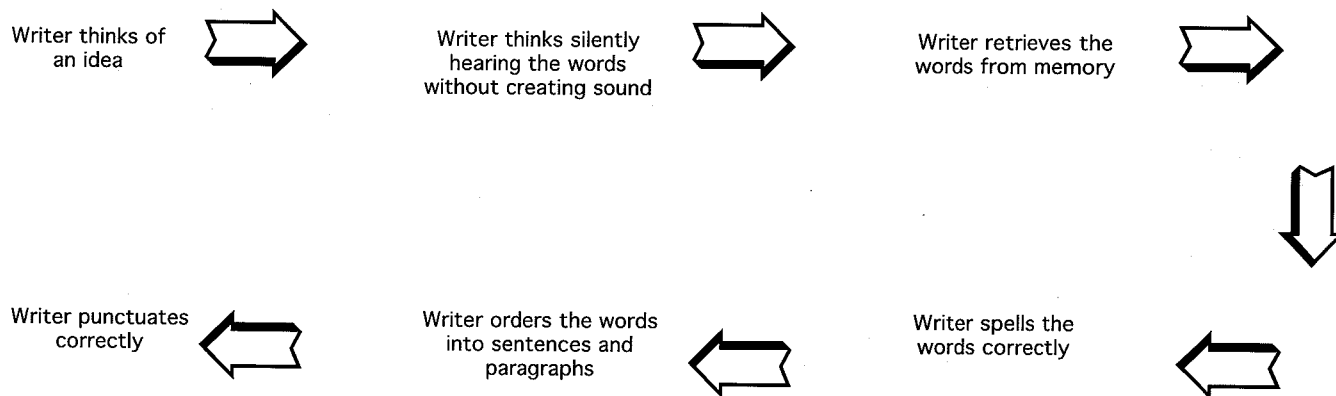
understanding, and using the word helps greatly in the visual retention of written words.

Speaking requires somewhat more complex abilities. It is this skill that most learners want to achieve since oral communication is more prominent in daily interactions. To achieve a level of fluency (the ease and smoothness of spoken language), the speaker must have a formulated vocabulary bank, and is able to connect these vocabulary words together to form phrases and sentences. *Writing*, usually the last component of the language process to be developed, is the most complex of the four elements. Writing is dependent upon listening, reading, and speaking skills. To communicate through writing, the writer must have the capacity to formulate thought patterns into visible sentences that are comprehensible to others (Webber p. 8). The sequence of writing is outlined in Figure #2.

Developing the Skills

The development of communication skills through language cannot occur without opportunity to learn. Without this, the development process can be confusing and often frustrating. This must be avoided because a lack of confidence can make day-to-day work responsibilities very difficult indeed.

Figure #2



tion of smaller word parts (syllables) to which letters can be attached to achieve meaning. If this approach fails, the reader turns to the dictionary (a book that should be a part of every learner's library). The decoding of written words requires the learner to draw upon vocabulary for both sound and meaning. Sound and meaning are enhanced further through the vocal expression of the word. Hearing,

If we use the following acronym when developing the four main skills, then *active learning* will take place. The acronym is this:

F M A D

F = formulation M = merging A = acquiring D = diversity

If an individual applies this acronym to language learning, he/she should firstly, *formulate* obtainable goals and objectives that will allow him/her to become an effective communicator. These goals should include the desired competencies or outcomes that will help oneself to perform daily job tasks more efficiently. For example, listed below are 12 language competencies designed for a person employed in a business-related field.

The development of communication skills through language cannot occur without opportunity to learn.

1. Demonstrate how to open/close a seminar, talk, negotiation, or meeting.
2. Exhibit how to ask for clarification and obtain additional information.
3. Present information clearly and concisely.
4. Make suggestions, give reasons, and summarize information accurately.
5. Check for understanding of information.
6. Offer and discuss alternate solutions by interrupting both effectively and politely.
7. Demonstrate how to bring other people into a discussion.
8. Apply delaying techniques (when one needs time to think before speaking).
9. Practice how to state preferences and persuade others.
10. Express a difference of opinion.
11. Discuss probabilities and similarities.
12. Provide description while presenting and supporting decisions.

Secondly, one should make an assertive attempt to *merge* as many of the four basic language skills into each goal or objective. If #10 from the above list is closely looked at, it is obviously a "speaking task." However, before a speaker can express his/her differences of opinion orally, he or she must read or hear a statement that creates disagreement. Now, two additional language skills are being incorporated, or *merged* along with the speaking task.

Thirdly, one should try and *acquire* the additional language skill(s) if one or more of the main four is missing from the original merger. If #10 is again observed after the merger, one of the basic skills is still missing. After pinpointing "writing" as the missing element, an activity can be developed that will allow for its acquisition. For instance, one can record the expression of difference in a journal or even write a short memorandum that includes the difference of opinion. Repetitive acquisition of the missing language skills will eventually expand existing communication skills as well as reduce mistakes.

Lastly, after acquiring all four of the basic language skills, one should *diversify*, or add variation. One way to accomplish this feat is to perform a culminating activity. In order to reach higher levels of fluency, the culminating activity should include a business-related application with an interactive approach. Here is one particular culminating activity:

"Plan a meeting"

Assume that the next meeting of your students' organization will discuss preparations for a careers day that will be held in 3 months. The group will hear and read reports from committees working on speakers, business recruiters, publicity, reservations of campus space, setup of booths, and any other matters you can think of. As president of your Student Organization, write an agenda for the meeting. Then, speak your introductory remarks to open the meeting. All written items will be gathered, stapled, and placed in a business portfolio.

The underlined words are evidence that all four of the basic language skills have been incorporated into the culminating activity. This procedure provides the means for overall effective communication (Guffey p. 319).

Measuring the Skills

Measuring language skills requires the use of a number of techniques. However, measurement is not merely a collection of techniques – it is a systematic process. It begins with the identification of the intended objectives, and ends with a judgment on whether or not the objectives have been attained. One style of measurement is that of performance assessment. The learners must carry out an activity or produce a product that includes the second language as the means of communicating their ideas.



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Performance assessment permits the learners to show what they can do in a simulated situation. If the identified goal is to “present information both clearly and concisely,” how can this be measured for effective communication? First of all, the learners (employees in this case), all asked to perform a certain activity such as giving an oral presentation on marketing strategies to a medium-sized audience. The employees must be monitored closely to see if the **FMAD** strategy is applied to the presentation. The first step is to see if the employees **formulate** their own goal i.e. to give an informative speech on marketing strategies by using clear and concise English. Next, the employees should **merge** their communication skills required to complete the given task. They could read a sample speech;

write an outline or rough draft; and deliver their speech in front of the audience. Furthermore, if the employees want to **acquire** the listening skill, they could listen to a recorded speech that is in similar fashion with their own. Moreover, the employees should **diversify** by putting together a portfolio that could be used as a resource for future company presentations. Included in the portfolio could be a videotape of their speech for listening and speaking reviews and samples of written outlines for reading and writing reviews.

Along with measuring the **FMAD** process for all of the communication skills, the initial identified goal must be measured as well. If the employees presented the information in a clear and concise manner, then the information would be meaningful, accurate, and appropriate.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to show that *effective communication* in today’s global environment depends on second language acquisition, primarily the English language. Acceptance of this concept requires a clear idea of the skills, the methods to develop them, and the ways to measure competence.

Language learners at all levels must continually use all of the four basic skills in order to become effective communicators. These are the best tools to build a working knowledge of English, the universal language for global businesses.

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